



Brands & Branding

Alberta

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Brands & Branding



AGRICULTURE

Animal Industry Division
Regulatory Services Branch
Stettler, Alberta

HISTORY

Brands originated in ancient times. The methods used by the Egyptians were very similar to those in use today. Branding remains an effective tool for identifying livestock; no other system has yet been devised to replace brands as a permanent mark of ownership.

An ordinance with respect to marking of livestock by the use of brands was passed at the second session of the North West Territories government of August 1, 1878. It represented the first move towards the registration of brands throughout Western Canada. Brands have been recognized in this part of Canada for more than one hundred years. In some cases, brands have become better known than the individuals who own them.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this pamphlet is to illustrate the importance of having brands properly recorded with the Provincial Brand Office. It outlines the general policies of the registration program and why a rigid program has to be followed in issuing new brands. It gives instruction on proper iron construction along with advice on methods for better brand application.

The cattle industry of Alberta has increased considerably during the past three decades, there are now more livestock producers with generally greater herd size. Market facilities have expanded as have the speed with which livestock are transported and handled through markets. These changes, together with the use of community pasture grazing, have increased the need for better branding practices to assure better identification, to provide adequate protection, and to assist with the rapid movement of livestock through trade channels.

PURPOSE OF A BRAND

A brand is a permanent mark applied to livestock for identification purposes. The holder of any brand that has been properly registered and renewed is offered protection by the Brand Inspection Services and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police against losses that may occur by livestock straying onto property owned by some other person. Livestock is often offered for sale, or harbored knowingly or unknowingly, by someone other than the rightful owner.

A properly recorded brand is prima facie evidence that livestock so branded is owned by the registered owner of that brand.

BRAND REGISTRATION

It is not compulsory to brand livestock in Alberta. However, it is unlawful to use a brand that is not registered or one that has expired.

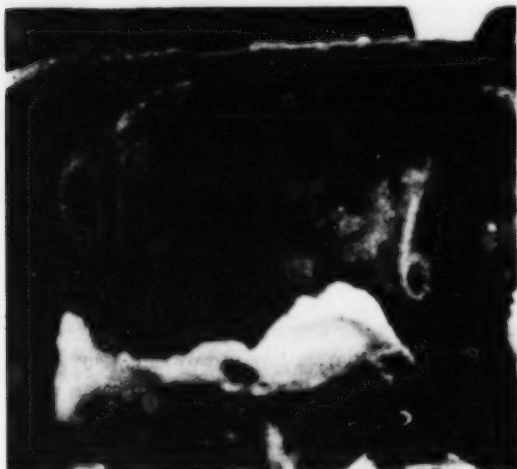
Cattle brands are registered for use in six positions: shoulder, rib and hip on both sides of an animal.

Horse brands are also registered for use in six positions: jaw, shoulder and thigh on both sides.



Single character brands of this type are no longer registered

The same brand characters constitute a completely different brand when placed on a different position of the animal. Therefore a brand must be applied to the same location on the animal as shown on the registration certificate. Otherwise, it could duplicate a brand already owned by some other person.



*Brands will
appear through
long winter
hair if applied
properly*

The cost to register a new brand is \$25 for a four-year period and \$20 for each subsequent four-year renewal. The ownership of a brand can be legally transferred by having the transfer recorded with the Brand Recorder. The cost of a transfer is \$25 and transfer application forms are available only from the Provincial Brand Office at Stettler.

Registration applications are carefully checked for similarities to other characters in the same general geographical area. There are approximately 20 possible conflictions that are checked against each other, a few examples being:

B as to **R P 8**

D as to **O**

2 as to **Z 7**

S as to **5**

A cattle brand will not be issued if it is likely to conflict with any other brand within a radius of 100 miles. Examples of conflicting brands are:

$\overline{25}$ and $\overline{ZS}$

$\triangle 02$ and $\triangle DZ$

$\smile KR$ and $\smile XB$

Single letters or single numerals cannot be registered, because they can be altered too easily by adding characters. Furthermore, the registration of a single character would rule out a vast number of possible combinations with that character.

Arbitrary signs of intricate design cannot be registered. They are difficult to interpret correctly and impossible to index satisfactorily in a brand book.

A number brand, consisting of one or more arabic numerals from 0 to 9 inclusive, may be applied by a registered brand owner, providing the number applied is placed on the same side and in conjunction with the owner's registered brand. For a number to be legal it must be placed on the shoulder or hip and may be used for the following purposes:

- to determine the age of livestock
- for herd record purposes
- to identify different owners of livestock in a feedlot.

It is legal to vent a brand, that is, to cancel its ownership. This can be done by the selling brand owner placing one letter or numeral of that brand in a lazy position immediately below the brand.

Brands of undesirable design that do not meet with the present policy standards, but which were registered before any well-defined policy was established, are accepted as long as they are regularly renewed or legally transferred. However, when such a brand is allowed to expire, it is not reissued.

Reasons for such a rigid and definite policy of registering brands are:

- A defined brand pattern can be readily recognized by all brand inspectors.
- Brands should lend themselves to a simple, generally recognized, verbal description.

- The whole brand structure is designed to be a simple and readily defined system for indexing by computer.

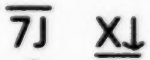
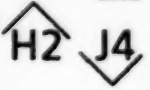
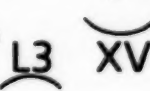
BRAND DESIGN

The basic design for most brands will consist of a combination of characters, signs and symbols. The characters used are the letters of the English alphabet in block forms and the ten arabic numerals from 0 to 9. The signs used are the anchor, box, diamond and triangle. The symbols used are the bar, half diamond, quarter circle and running bar. The running bar is only registered directly in front, behind or in between two characters.

Letters and numbers are never inverted and leaning characters or slashes are not used. The two signs recognized as the split end bar and shelter brand are used only for government sponsored organizations. Hanging, swinging, flying and walking characters are not acceptable.

The letter **G** is registered in a reverse position only, as **Ɔ**. This is to avoid conflict with the letter **C** which is never reversed. The letter **Q** is never registered because it would conflict with the letter **O**. The letters **I** and **O** are used only with other letters and the numerals **1** and **0** are used only with another number. The letter **J** is always registered without a top so it will not conflict with the letter **T**.

Most brands are a combination of two characters or signs with a bar, half diamond or quarter circle placed above or below.

1. A bar can only be registered above or below. 
2. Half diamonds are always registered with the ends pointing towards the brand. 
3. Quarter circles always have the ends pointing away from the brand to prevent any similarity with the half diamond. 

- Brands with two characters can be registered only by having one character directly over the other.

D H
W J

- Brands that incorporate a running bar can only be registered on a rib position.

-S7 4B-  

- Brands may consist of three characters. These must be registered in line on the rib position because of the larger area needed to apply the brand properly.

777 OVT

- Lazy characters are used as little as possible because most do not contribute to the make up of a good brand. Only one lazy character is allowed in each brand. The noted letters are authorized as lazy characters and used lazy to the left only.

ABDEFH
MPRSTU

- Monogram brands are two characters to be joined together by a common side. Only certain characters suit this type of registration because brands are monogrammed from left to right. Monogrammed brands also must incorporate a symbol.

ABEDBA 
KMRNU 

RECORDER OF BRANDS

It is important that brand owners keep the Recorder of Brands informed of address changes. In many cases, brands are allowed to expire because the owners cannot be located. When this happens the possibility exists that a good brand could be lost forever. If a certain brand does not appear in the current brand book, it does not necessarily mean it can be registered in your area.

When branding errors occur, the Recorder of Brands must be notified of the error and the number of livestock so branded. This will prevent embarrassing and serious complications at a later date.

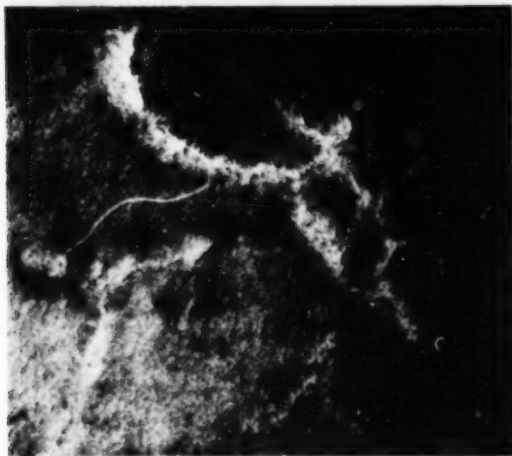
All correspondence that pertains to the registration of new brands, renewal, transfers, expiring dates and application forms should be directed to:

Recorder of Brands
Regulatory Services Branch
Postal Bag 600
STETTTLER, Alberta
TOC 2LO

BRAND APPLICATION

There is little purpose in going to the expense and energy of applying a brand that is not evident under all conditions, readable under most conditions and definitely legible when clipped.

The scar tissue that makes a good brand visible tends to discourage most people from using the proper methods of application. A good brand applied properly is similar to a serial number or trade mark and is more tamperproof than a birth certificate.



*Poor branding
is a waste of
effort and
money*

An owner can usually identify poor brands as long as the livestock are at home. The problem arises when the detection of ownership is resting with someone else: a neighbor, brand inspector, or a policeman. Unfortunately most critical inspections occur at a time of long hair growth.

A good brand can be compared to a pleasing picture. A poor brand is the sign of a careless operator.

Common faults in branding are:

- irons of faulty construction
- irons that are too small
- irons that are too narrow on the face
- improper heat
- the use of liquid or acid.

SIZE OF IRONS

Cattle

Every branding iron should be made of good quality steel heavy enough to hold heat. The size of the iron is very important. For calves younger than one year, each character should be not less than 4 inches in height and 3 inches wide, outside measurements. An iron 6 inches high and $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide should be used for grown cattle. The size of the metal used to build irons should be 2 inches by $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. The face of the branding surface should be worked down to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch in width. The edges and corners should be slightly rounded. This will tend to



*Well branded
cattle can be
identified at all
times*

narrow the face somewhat, but will leave the centre of the burning face slightly higher and maintain a concave effect on the surface of the skin to be branded. If two or more pieces of metal join at the face of an iron, a notch at least $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep should be filed or cut away at the joint to allow some heat to escape. This will prevent too

much heat from being applied at these points and avoid blotching. The actual width of the burning face is also an important factor.

A good brand is recognized by an iron burning all the hair and enough skin to leave a definite and permanent scar on the hide. A good brand warps or dislocates the hair follicles that are located under several layers of skin. The new hair grows at a different angle from that of the original hair, leaving the brand visible. If the burning face is too narrow, it will not disrupt enough hair follicles to create a visible brand after hairing over.

Horses

The iron used to brand horses can be somewhat smaller. An iron 2 inches high, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide, with a face $\frac{3}{16}$ inches wide should be satisfactory. Horsehide is much thinner than cowhide.



*The result of
placing more
than one
character on
each handle*

PROPER IRON CONSTRUCTION

It is strongly recommended that each character of a brand be made on a separate handle. Handles should be made from $\frac{1}{4}$ inch rod and should be 4 feet in length from the head of the iron to the handle loop. If a combination of characters is placed on one handle, they will heat and burn unevenly. It also tends to slip during application and leaves a distorted, blotched brand. A well constructed iron is the same as a good tool and should be treated as such. When your branding irons are not in use they should be stored in a dry safe place to prevent rusting, warping and damage to the shape. Keep the iron head clean

and smooth by using a wire brush or file rather than banging it against a post. If through constant use and age irons become worn down to a sharp edge, discard them and have new ones made. Just because they are constructed of good steel does not guarantee they will last forever.

METHODS OF HEATING IRONS

Solid dry wood is the best fuel for heating branding irons. In order to contain a good bed of coals, dig a small pit in the ground 3 feet long, 1½ feet wide and 10 inches deep. Build the fire over the pit using wood longer than the pit and place it on the fire lengthways. Build a fire bigger than is needed and allow it to burn down until a bed of red hot coals is gathered in the bottom of the pit. Keep the branding irons on top of the coals and not in the flames of the fire.

The use of a propane bottle and a burner has also become a satisfactory method for heating branding irons. A steel drum or round pipe designed to contain the heat thrown by the burner is recommended. The irons are placed in the container where the heat is pressurized somewhat. This type of heat is clean, easy to move and store, and leaves no untidy site.

An oven constructed from brick or cement is also suitable. This type of oven is usually fuelled by natural gas, which has a tendency to burn out irons quickly. These ovens are permanent fixtures and are only built in locations where a continuous volume of cattle is to be branded.

DEGREE OF HEAT

The actual amount of heat needed to apply a good brand is rather difficult to explain. Experience is necessary for most people to recognize the correct iron temperature. The color of the heating iron seems to be the secret. When a metal iron is first placed in a fire it will accumulate carbon and appear very black. A black iron is too cold. It may be hot enough to burn the hair but not hot enough to deform the roots of the hair follicles, which is essential for a permanent brand.

If the iron is allowed to become red it is too hot. When the red hot iron is placed on the hide it will cause a hair fire and burn the hide more than is needed. When too hot an iron is applied it causes too much of the branded area to scab off, causing a large sore. In order for a sore of this kind to heal it must find extra hide; the live skin around

the branded area will stretch and destroy the original design of the brand, or the sore may never hair over. Therefore, too much heat only leaves an indistinct or blotched brand.



An overheated iron produces unsatisfactory results

To do good branding an iron should have reached the color of grey ashes. It is then hot enough to burn away all the carbon deposit and yet not so hot that it will ignite the hair or cook the hide.

If the branding iron is made of copper, it will not appear grey but will show its natural dull copper color when hot. However it will collect carbon and appear black when it is cold.

HOT IRON BRANDING

The hot iron method for branding is the most efficient way of identifying livestock. One reason for so many poor brands is that inexperienced people are using the irons. It is difficult to be exact about the amount of time the iron should be applied because of the difference in hair conditions. If an iron is at the right temperature the application should only take from 3 to 5 seconds on cattle with a light hair cover. Cattle with an extensive hair growth should be clipped, otherwise a longer period of application is necessary. The job can be done quickly by pressing firmly and rocking the handle slightly to

vary the pressure and obtain uniform application of the entire character. This will prevent overburn or underburn in any one spot. When the iron is lifted, the hide should be the color of buckskin or new saddle leather. Burning too lightly makes a temporary brand that will disappear entirely when the animal changes hair.

Only one application is necessary if the iron is applied correctly. If a second application is needed to touch up a spot or obtain more burn, do it with extreme care and in the exact position of the first design. Holding the iron on too long causes unnecessary pain and excessive burning and produces a wound that has difficulty healing.

Do not brand livestock when the hair is damp or wet. An iron applied to wet hide loses temperature rapidly and scalds rather than burns the branded area. This results in overscabbing and a sore that has difficulty in healing.

Do not brand over another brand. A good way to avoid this is to clip the hair from the area where your brand is being applied. If there is already a brand on that location, place your brand above, below, in front of, or behind the existing brand. Keep your brand in the correct registered position if possible.



*The result of
branding over
another brand*

In order to apply a good brand the animal must be prevented from moving as much as possible. This can be done either by manual wrestling or by using a good cattle squeeze. For calves, use the manual wrestling method or a calf table. For older cattle, use a squeeze with an opening large enough to apply the brand properly and to avoid crowding the irons on the animal.

Do not hurry a branding job. The animal will wear your brand all of its life, so give it a good one.

ELECTRIC BRANDING IRONS

The use of electrically heated irons has become more common in recent years. The main drawback to electric irons is the cost, and the tendency to cluster two or three characters on one handle (heating element) to reduce the cost. This practice not only results in characters that are too small and too close together, but lessens the possibility of rocking the iron to obtain a distinct outline of each character. Electric irons are entirely satisfactory if each character is of the recommended size and on a separate handle or offset on the same handle. It is recommended that the source of power be near the branding site. A heavy extension cord is required to provide sufficient heat to the iron. Faulty cords and poor connections should be avoided. Electric irons are used extensively in feedlots and are recommended where an operator is branding on a regular basis.



*Acid or liquid
are not
recommended*

ACID BRANDING

Liquid or acid brands are not recommended because the burning action takes place over several days. Even though the liquid may be applied without running, the prolonged irritation causes animals to

rub against one another, or some other object, to relieve the constant burning. Any run or spread of the branding fluid distorts the intended characters to a point where they cannot be read. The humane aspect of the liquid brand is often overemphasized without recognizing that prolonged burning is necessary to produce a brand scar. Livestock producers who have experimented with this method in the past have found that it does not result in brands that give positive identification.

FREEZE BRANDING

During the past two decades branding livestock with a branding iron using an extremely cold temperature has become more common. Although this method requires different equipment from hot iron branding, and application is much more difficult, requiring more time, the final result is a distinct visible brand.

The branding iron used for freeze branding is most often made of copper, but good quality steel performs satisfactorily also. The head of the iron can be constructed the same as the hot iron, except that a good thickness and depth of metal must be used to obtain the maximum benefit of the liquid used to help keep the iron cold. The handle can be somewhat shorter, approximately 12 to 15 inches in length. Each freeze brand character should not be less than $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in height and 3 inches wide. The metal used should be $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. The face of the branding surface must be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, with the corners well rounded.

An insulated container is necessary, large enough to hold sufficient wood alcohol or methyl hydrate to completely cover the head of the irons. A good supply of dry ice is required to cool the liquid to a temperature of minus 90° to 100° Fahrenheit. Place the branding irons in the liquid and start adding dry ice. Gloves are required to handle the dry ice. When the liquid quits boiling, the irons have reached a temperature cold enough to apply the irons. The container holding the liquid and dry ice should be kept covered as much as possible to prevent evaporation of the liquid. Depending on the length of time necessary to complete the branding job, more alcohol will need to be added because of evaporation, and more dry ice will have to be added from time to time to keep the alcohol as cold as possible.

Livestock of any age can be branded using this method. The hair must be clipped very closely from the area of the brand regardless of their age or the amount of hair. Therefore, a good set of clippers is required. After the hair is clipped, the area should be washed with

alcohol to remove any dirt or dust on the hide. The livestock must be restrained so as to prevent any great amount of movement. The cold iron must be applied very firmly using two hands to apply pressure evenly on the complete brand character. When done, you have an area indented sufficiently to allow you to run your finger around the brand design. This is an indication you will have a good brand. Should the animal move to the extent the iron has to be removed, be sure it is replaced exactly in the same spot. For spring calves less than three months old, the cold iron must be applied for at least 45 seconds. For yearlings and older cattle, application must not be less than 60 seconds per character to maintain good results.

After the freeze brand has been applied, the branded area will swell as with frost bite. Within several days the swelling will disappear and there will be no evidence of any brand at all. A small amount of dead skin will be evident in about 7 to 10 days, but the brand will not be visible again until the brand design is outlined by the regrowth of white hair on the branded area. The color pigment of the hair is destroyed by the cold branding. The final result should show the brand in beautiful white hair, making the brand visible during all seasons of the year. On white cattle the iron must be held on each animal for at least 90 seconds. This will destroy the hair growth completely and leave the branded area without any hair cover whatsoever.

The freeze branding method outlined is the least expensive method. To obtain a colder iron requiring slightly less time to apply, a semen tank using liquid nitrogen as a cooling liquid gives best results.

ELECTRONIC IDENTIFICATION

Within the past decade, the technology has been developed for using implants, ear tags or neck tags which give off a programmed signal to be picked up by a reading unit. The implants vary in size, but some nonsurgical implants are approximately 3/8 of an inch in length and 1/16 inch in diameter and cost about \$7 each. Tags cost between \$10 and \$25. Depending upon the system used, an accurate reading distance of these electronic identification systems varies from a few inches to several feet.

At the present time, the most practical application of electronic identification is in the dairy industry, where neck tags can be used on individual animals and each animal is handled and reviewed at least twice per day. This system will allow complete monitoring of the

production, and feeding, and allow the operator to program changes into the herd management program.

There is potential for the use of electronic identification in the beef industry. Development will likely occur first in the feedlot sector, followed by the transportation sector, then in marketing and the packing plant. Electronic identification lends itself to situations where there is full control of the animals and it is important to get accurate data on each animal.

Improvement in electronic identification systems is needed before there will be wide application in the beef sector of the livestock industry. The next generation of livestock producers may enjoy new technology of this kind, but in the meantime, the livestock industry will have to do with the old method of hot iron branding for identification.

BRAND INSPECTION

Brand inspection is provided by Alberta Agriculture through legislation. It furnishes a system that offers protection to all livestock owners through the use of brands and for all livestock offered for sale within the province, including the livestock exported out of the province. This is the reason proper brand application is emphasized. Furthermore, livestock owners are obligated by law to describe their stock accurately on a livestock manifest every time they are transported within the province, and especially when they are being offered for sale. A proper description includes describing brands.

Every year a large number of livestock is sold with brands registered to someone other than the contributor; often shipments are not accompanied by proper bills of sale or described properly on a livestock manifest. This means the livestock must be handled more than necessary by brand inspectors and treated differently from those with proper documentation.

In many cases the proceeds must be withheld until bills of sale can be produced or an investigation conducted to establish proper ownership of the livestock. This could be prevented if livestock owners accepted their responsibility of ensuring proper bills of sale are obtained when livestock are purchased.

BILLS OF SALE

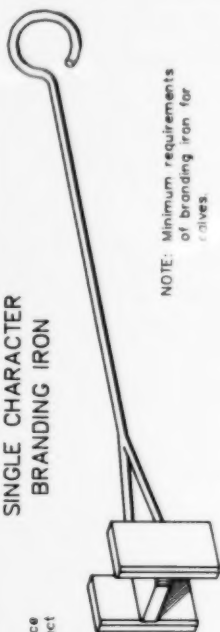
When selling cattle or horses, other than through a public market, the seller is obligated by law to provide the new owner with a bill of sale showing the date, the number of livestock, a proper description of the animals, and the last recorded brand.

Every person who purchases cattle or horses, whether from an individual or through a private or public sale, should obtain a complete description in writing of the animals purchased, showing the date and the last recorded brand. All such bills of sale should be carefully retained as proof of ownership until the livestock are subsequently offered for sale.

All cattle and horses sold through public markets in Alberta must pass the scrutiny of a brand inspection service. Remember, the efficiency of this service and the security it provides to brand owners depends in large measure on how well the brands have been applied.

SINGLE CHARACTER BRANDING IRON

NOTE: All surfaces on the face
of the iron that connect
must be notched.
Grind sharp edges
off burning surface
of branding iron.



NOTE: Minimum requirements
of branding iron for
colives.

